St. Simeon Stylites: from Ecclesiastical History, I.13

[Davis Introduction]

Very early after their inception, the monks of the Greco-Oriental church ran off into practices which the more rational Latin church of the West never imitated. What passed for "extreme holiness" in Syria in the fifth century A.D. is shown by this story of St. Simeon of the Pillar. Attempts in Gaul to imitate this man were wisely frowned upon by the Church authorities.

Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.13:

In these times [about 440 A.D.] flourished and became illustrious, Simeon, of holy and famous memory, who originated the contrivance of stationing himself on the top of a column, thereby occupying a space of scarce two cubits in circumference. This man, endeavoring to realize in the flesh the existence of the heavenly hosts, lifts himself above the concerns of earth, and overpowering the downward tendency of man's nature, is intent on things above. He was adored by all the countryside, wrought many miracles, and the Emperor Theodosius II listened to his advice and sought his benediction.

Simeon prolonged his endurance of this mode of life through fifty-six years; nine of which he spent in the first monastery where he was instructed in divine knowledge, and forty-seven in the "Mandra" as it was called; namely, ten in a certain nook; on shorter columns, seven; and thirty upon one of forty cubits. After his departure [from this life] his holy body was conveyed to Antioch, escorted by the garrison, and a great concourse guarding the venerable body, lest the inhabitants of the neighboring cities should gather and carry it off. In this manner it was conveyed to Antioch, and attended, during its progress, with extraordinary prodigies.

The body has been preserved nearly entire until my time [about 580 A.D.]; and in company with many priests, I enjoyed a sight of his sacred head, in the episcopate of the famous Gregory, when Philippicus had requested that precious relic of the saints might be sent him for the protection of the Eastern armies. The head was well preserved save for the teeth some of which had been violently removed by the hands of the pious [for relics].

According to another writer, Theodoret, in Simeon's lifetime, he was visited by pilgrims from near and far; Persia, Ethiopia, Spain, and even Britain. To these at times he delivered sermons. He wore on his body a heavy iron chain. In praying, "he bent his body so that his forehead almost touched his feet." A spectator once counted 1244 repetitions of this movement, and then gave up reckoning. Simeon took only one scanty meal per week, and fasted through the season of Lent. It is alleged that the devil having afflicted him with an ulcer in his thigh as reward for a little self-righteousness, Simeon, as penance, never touched the afflicted leg upon the pillar again, and stood for the remaining year of his life upon one leg.

Source.

From: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources,* 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: *Rome and the West*, pp. 348-349.

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